**Trade Deficit**

*269. SHRI THANGABAALU: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) what was the percentage reduction foreign trade deficit from 1985-86 to 1986-87; and

(b) what are the reasons for the low percentage reduction in deficit?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI P. SHIV SHANKER). (a) and (b) According to the provisional data available for the first nine months of the current financial year, the trade deficit at Rs. 5210.55 crores during April—December, 1986 was Rs. 1000.45 crores lower as compared to Rs. 6211.00 crores during the corresponding period of the previous year, thereby registering a significant decline of 16.1 per cent. This significant decline in trade deficit is attributable to improve performance of exports while imports have increased only marginally. During April-December, 1986, the exports increased by 17.3 per cent while imports increased only 2.3 per cent as compared to the corresponding period of the previous year.

**Effect of Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980**

*271. SHRI SHANKER SINH VAGHELA:

SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN:

Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the present Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 guidelines make prior permission necessary even for using the degraded forest land for afforestation and that this has come in the way of even forest restoration schemes and thus rendering the provisions of the Act counter-productive;

(b) what are the facts and the consequences thereof; and

(c) what advice has been given to the States for going ahead with forest restoration schemes?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI BHAJAN LAL): (a) to (c) It is not true that afforestation of degraded forests requires prior approval of Government of India. The approval of Government of India is required if degraded forest lands are to be assigned to individuals and private institutions. The provision in the guidelines that the State Government cannot assign Government forest lands to individuals and private institutions for afforestation is not counter-productive to the work of forest restoration.

**Remote sensing Survey of Forest Area**

*272. PROF. B. RAMACHANDRA RAO:

SHRI ADINARAYANA REDDY:

Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) what is the total forest area in the country as per the latest remote sensing survey;

(b) what is the rate at which the forest area in the country is dwindling every year;

(c) what steps are being taken to ensure that 5 million hectares is afforested every year; and

(d) whether there is any proposal to lease vacant land to paper industry to enable them to develop the forest needed by them for their raw materials?